

Naval War College
Newport, R.I.

Warrior as Diplomat: Peace Operations in the Post-Cold War World

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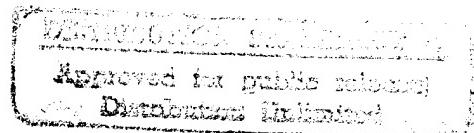
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A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of Joint Military Operations.

The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Departments of Navy or State.

Signature:

DTIC QUALITY INSPECTED 4



14 June 1996

Paper Directed by
Captain Charles W. Jackson, USN
Chairman, Joint Military Operations Department

19960813 151

UNCLASSIFIED

Security Classification This Page

REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE

1. Report Security Classification: UNCLASSIFIED			
2. Security Classification Authority:			
3. Declassification/Downgrading Schedule:			
4. Distribution/Availability of Report: DISTRIBUTION STATEMENT A: APPROVED FOR PUBLIC RELEASE; DISTRIBUTION IS UNLIMITED.			
5. Name of Performing Organization: JOINT MILITARY OPERATIONS DEPARTMENT			
6. Office Symbol: C	7. Address: NAVAL WAR COLLEGE 686 CUSHING ROAD NEWPORT, RI 02841-1207		
8. Title (Include Security Classification): Warrior as Diplomat: Peace Operations in the Post-Cold War World (U)			
9. Personal Authors: D. Purnell Delly, U.S. Department of State			
10. Type of Report: FINAL	11. Date of Report: 20 MAY 96		
12. Page Count: 20			
13. Supplementary Notation: A paper submitted to the Faculty of the NWC in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the JMO Department. The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the NWC or the Departments of the Navy or State.			
14. Ten key words that relate to your paper: PEACE OPERATIONS, PEACEKEEPING, PEACE ENFORCEMENT, POLITICS, SOMALIA, BOSNIA, DIPLOMACY, MILITARY OPERATIONS OTHER THAN WAR, UNITED NATIONS, JTF, UNOSOM.			
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16. Distribution / Availability of Abstract:	Unclassified X	Same As Rpt	DTIC Users
17. Abstract Security Classification: UNCLASSIFIED			
18. Name of Responsible Individual: CHAIRMAN, JOINT MILITARY OPERATIONS DEPARTMENT			
19. Telephone: 841- 6461 6461	20. Office Symbol:	C	

Security Classification of This Page Unclassified

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Introduction: The “Politics” of Peace Operations

War is politics by other means. In conventional war, the operational commander must be attuned to national political objectives. His operational strategy must seek to achieve them. In short, the operational commander exercises not only military but *political* judgment in formulating strategy.

But some wars are more “political” than others. And a convincing case can be made that the most political intervention of all is not war, but rather “peace” operations. When the American commander finds himself in such an operation, particularly one which involves ethnic conflict, he must possess strong “political” skills across the board.

As always, he must understand national political objectives in articulating his military OOTW strategy. But this is not all that tests his political acumen. Command and control are perennial problems in peace operations, particularly UN multinational enforcement operations. The American commander, as UN Force Commander (or U.S.-led coalition leader) of a multinational force must display considerable “political” skill in forging unity of effort among culturally diverse national contingents where unity of command simply does not exist.

But the American commander must also be attuned to broader Washington politics, and to the role intense media scrutiny can play in influencing national policy and thus his mission. He must be acutely aware that issues of restraint, ROE, and American casualties can assume even greater importance than in conventional conflict when placed under the media microscope that accompanies peace operations. In the glare of the media spotlight, saturation coverage of a single event (like the Ranger tragedy in Somalia) can force a major reappraisal and even reversal of U.S. policy.

Moreover, particularly in peace enforcement or humanitarian operations in tense and hostile environments, the American commander must understand the often shadowy and complex politics of opposing factions to successfully execute his mission. Indeed, there is no way that he can steer completely clear of entanglement in the broader politics of the conflict. In hostile environments, the very act of reestablishing stability will anger factions who seek gain through violence and chaos. Creating a secure environment for humanitarian aid delivery can anger groups who seek to feed their own, and starve their enemies. The American commander must understand this, so he is prepared for the risks, provocations, and perhaps full-fledged combat that may result from it.

Thus peace operations, particularly in hostile environments, are bristling with "political" challenges for the American commander. He will not always have his State Department political advisor at his side. And in reality, if a decision risks American lives he may prefer his own (or superior's) best judgment to that of his advisor's. If there are irreconcilable differences between the commander and relevant Ambassador, the issue may have to be resolved at senior levels in Washington. But the fact remains that there will frequently be political import to decisions made by American commanders. America's best commanders have always had finely-tuned political antennae. In the age of mass media and increasingly bold UN interventions, these instincts have been tested as never before.

The American Commander and "The Politics of Coalitions"

Peace enforcement interventions are virtually always multinational affairs.¹ Unfortunately for the commander, this means that there may be as many different interpretations of the UN's mandate as there are nations contributing forces. Divergent national interests often

¹ F.T. Liu, United Nations Peacekeeping: Management and Operations (New York: International Peace Academy 1990), 4.

mean that each contributing nation -- including the United States -- places politically-driven constraints on how and where its forces may operate, vastly complicating the Force Commander's command and control challenges.²

Somalia is a perfect example of the "politics" of peace operations and the challenges posed for the American operational commander. It is particularly appropriate because it illustrates three different command and control structures: a traditional, UN Chapter VI peacekeeping operation (UNOSOM I); a U.S.-led coalition under UN Chapter VII (UNITAF); and, a UN-led Chapter VII peace enforcement operation (UNOSOM II).³

Almost every single contributing nation to the Somalia intervention, at one time or another, drew sharp limits around the scope of its mission, and/or the geographical area in which it would work. Among countries with specific geographic requirements, the Belgians, for example, refused to work anywhere other than in Kismayo where Belgian HRO relief efforts were concentrated. The Italians insisted on northern Mogadishu, even though this divided the city in a way which complicated security efforts. Smaller contingents also made their demands, most insisting on operating near or on the airfield away from more dangerous environs.⁴

During UNITAF, the U.S. JTF commander was able to accommodate such wishes, and the overall UNITAF mission suffered little. Belgian forces, for example, stayed in Kismayo, but were quite effective in getting aid through. However, when nation-building expanded under UNOSOM II, these contingents were often unwilling to move out to fully occupy their assigned humanitarian relief sector, complicating UN Force Commander Bir's already difficult unity of

² William J. Durch, "Keeping the Peace: The UN in the Emerging World Order," The Henry L. Stimson Center, 1992, 64.

³ Stephen Green, "Somalia's Lessons for the UN," Christian Science Monitor, July 1993, 19.

⁴ Major Harold E. Bullock, "Peace by Committee: Command and Control Issues in Multinational Peace Enforcement Operations," Unpublished Thesis, School of Advanced Airpower Studies, Air University, Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama: 1994, 54.

effort challenges. Again, the Belgian contingent is a good example. While doing an excellent job within the city, it practically ignored the surrounding countryside.⁵

“... like a figurehead who reigns but does not rule. . .”⁶

Compounding geographic constraints were mission restrictions borne out of a need to reduce or eliminate risk. After the shooting began in earnest during UNOSOM II, General Bir's control in Mogadishu was severely tested. Perhaps the most extreme example was the German contingent which could not accept any possibility of casualties. The Italians, Pakistanis, and Moroccans drew into defensive postures and refused to man road blocks, patrol, or operate at night. The Pakistanis went so far as to make back room deals with Aideed's forces for safe passage through UNOSOM areas. Some UN military advisors attributed this problem to varying interpretations of UN Resolution 814 which authorized the rebuilding of Somalia as a nation. While the U.S. saw the need to “marginalize” the warlords, the Italians saw a strictly humanitarian UNOSOM II mission. The vague resolution caused a failure in translating UN political guidance into operational and tactical guidance.⁷

Thus contributing nations come to a UN multinational operation with a quiltwork of constraints on what they will do, when, and how. These constraints spring from the diverse *national politics and political agendas* of the contributing nations themselves, vastly complicating the U.S. commander's command and control challenges. The commander and his staff must have the *political* foresight to anticipate these divergent interests, and draw on the POLAD, American embassies, and specifically the political sections and Defense Attachés in embassies for their views at the planning stage on possible limitations national contingents may

⁵ Ibid., 55.

⁶ James H. Baker, “Central Control Essential in UN ‘Peacefare,’” *Army Times*, June 1993, 31.

⁷ Donald Daniel, ed., Beyond Traditional Peacekeeping (New York: St. Martin's Press: 1995), 197.

impose on what they will do, and where. Foresight and prior planning are critical to attaining unity of effort where independent national chains of command make unified command and control elusive if not impossible.

The Commander as Diplomat

There are other “political” dimensions to command of a multinational peace force, including interagency politics. For example, the American commander and his staff must be adept at the “politics” of dealing with civilian agencies like Humanitarian Relief Organizations (HROs) which possess a profoundly different “culture” from the military. Indeed, the need to deal with HROs on a continuous basis is central to many peace operations. In some contexts, the HROs have long histories and valuable insights and information about the country. In most cases they will still be there long after the military has left, sustaining the humanitarian effort.

However, HROs also have their own political philosophy and sometimes “political” agenda and are often very reluctant to cooperate closely with peace operators. Moreover, from the military’s perspective, it is often futile to seek to identify an HRO “chain of command” with which to deal; power and authority are diffused horizontally throughout the organization, with any semblance of hierarchical authority difficult to discern.⁸

Coordinating with such entities requires the U.S. force to accommodate its set routines with each agency’s unique priorities and mission. However, the U.S. military is often unfamiliar with HRO organizations, procedures, and cultures, while the HROs are concerned about their credibility as purely humanitarian organizations. Anything less can cost them their effectiveness, or even their lives. But the U.S. military and HROs must begin to understand each other better. While HROs must concede a degree of independence, it is equally important for

⁸ Dr. David S. Alberts, “Command and Control in Peace Operations,” Institute for National Strategic Studies, Center for Advanced Command Concepts and Technology, Fort McNair, Washington: 1994, 9.

the U.S. military to bring the HROs in on the early planning stages of an operation.⁹ To plan and then coordinate efforts on the ground, the American commander must have the *political* acumen to recognize the differences with HROs in culture, and the skill in interagency “politics” to ensure the differences are overcome and the requisite unity of effort achieved.

There are also interpersonal “politics” that an American commander and his forces must practice in peace operations. This is the political art of interaction with ones foreign colleagues without ruffling what to Americans are often overly sensitive feathers. While seemingly a “trivial” consideration at first glance, these cases in fact often require the highest degree of “diplomacy” if coalition harmony and unity of effort is to be maintained.

In Somalia, many U.S. officers were ignorant of the real power wielded by their foreign counterparts. When U.S. officers interacted with a Turkish or Moroccan major, for example, they were likely to treat him with the same deference they would an American of equal rank -- which is to say, very little. Most did not understand that foreign commanders were often hand-picked, highly educated, direct representatives of their governments. “Mere” majors and lieutenant colonels often reported regularly to their national command authorities.¹⁰

The implications for political and diplomatic relations are sobering, assuming, of course, U.S. officers can communicate with their counterparts. In Somalia the U.S. made diligent efforts to find Somali speakers, but made no systematic effort to find personnel fluent in other major languages. The assumption was that English would be used. However many countries had few English speakers, and therefore were slow to react to incidents. Among U.S. forces in Somalia, a particular shortfall was the lack of French speakers. Many forces employed in Somalia used French as their command and control language including the large French, Belgian, and

⁹ Bruce Friedman, “Peacekeeping: What Works? America’s Future Peacekeeping Policy,” Conference Report, Bureau of Intelligence and Research, Department of State, Washington: 1994, 2.

¹⁰ Bullock, 58.

Moroccan contingents. Fortunately, the U.S. had some officers who happened to speak French, but it was purely coincidence if a command had sufficient bilingual officers.¹¹

The “Politics” of Culture and Religion

The “politics” of potentially clashing cultures and religions can also cause problems. In Somalia just setting up areas of responsibility proved bedeviling. Often the JTF headquarters was surprised by the way forces aligned themselves. Despite a common C2 language, Tunisians and Moroccan forces preferred not to work under the French. The Tunisians worked well with the U.S. Army, while the Moroccans were most comfortable operating independently. Special care had to be taken so that the Greeks and Turks were never co-located. While General Johnston expected the Greeks to work best with the Italians, they actually ended up with the French. As Johnston himself observed, juggling national sensitivities with the requisite *political* sensitivity is “overall a complex and critical process.”¹²

Compatibilities were sometimes even bigger surprises in Somalia. Most expected the Pakistanis and Indians to have real problems, but they worked well together, using English as a common language. Likewise, an unexpectedly close relationship developed between Turkish and Pakistani forces because of a common religious link. The U.S. expected difficulties with the Italians in Mogadishu because of their colonial past, but their strong and continuing business ties turned out to be more important than lingering colonial problems.¹³

Other religious and cultural factors struck closer to home. Many Arabs were uncomfortable with the important role women play in the U.S. military. They were often offended by the dress and behavior of female soldiers, and some were offended by having to

¹¹ Ibid., 86.

¹² David J. Zvijac, “Operation Restore Hope: Summary Report,” Center for Naval Analyses, Strategy and Forces Division, 1994, 11.

¹³ Bullock, 88.

work directly with female officers. Some devout Islamic contingents were reluctant to support non-Islamic relief agencies, and religious holidays also caused problems. Daily fasting during the month of Ramadan significantly reduced the effectiveness of Moslem forces from the Arabian peninsula (a large portion).¹⁴

The U.S. was "politically" uninformed in other ways. The Somals (the northern nomadic Somalis) have a history as slave traders and look down on all other Africans (including the southern Sahb farmers) as racially and culturally inferior. As a result, Nigerians, Botswanans, Zimbabweans, and even black Americans were poorly received as peace enforcers or peacekeepers.¹⁵

More disturbingly, the DOD intelligence officer who worked with JCS planners claims there were few questions asked about Somali political structure. While the U.S. seemed to understand clan structure was important, we tended to see Somali society through Western eyes. Our attempts to deal with Aideed personally rather than by making him an outcast in the eyes of his clan is a prime example. Somalis universally think of conflict not as personal, but as a clan versus clan issue.¹⁶

A Complex Brew

Does the American commander in UN multinational interventions like Somalia have a State Department Political Advisor? Certainly he does, and if he does not, he must demand one. But a POLAD is no substitute for the politically astute American operational commander and staff. The commander and his staff must anticipate that contributing nations will have divergent *political* agendas affecting what they will do, when, and where. Thus as early as possible,

¹⁴ Ibid., 88.

¹⁵ Ibid., 89.

¹⁶ Ibid., 90

preferably in the planning stage, the U.S. commander must draw on his POLAD, American embassies, and specifically the political sections and Defense Attaches in American embassies for their views on how these contingents might limit their missions.

The American commander must also anticipate the cultural and linguistic dynamics between contributing nations, and how this will affect their working relationships and thus the Commander's unity of effort. He must also fathom the often complex cultural dynamics between contributing nations and host country nationals. In short, the "politics of coalitions" is a very complex brew of diverse and divergent political agendas, culture, religion, and language. Successful execution of the mission, and America's overall political objectives in the theater depend on how well the American commander reads and copes with the "politics of coalitions."

"Peace operations tend to compress the strategic, operational, and tactical levels of command and control. In any UN operation there is a tendency to expect the theater commander to translate the political guidance into military missions -- a role usually played by a national level joint or general staff. . ."¹⁷

This is the highest form of political art that the American commander must practice. It is also the most difficult. "Translating political guidance into military missions" requires exercise of the most discerning political judgment, usually under withering scrutiny of the media, Congress, and coalition partners. It's often a thankless task, as Admiral Leighton Smith is finding out in Bosnia.

In a recent New York Times article, diplomats complained that the Admiral is reluctant to enforce key provisions in the Dayton Accord.¹⁸ He is not tracking down war criminals, they allege. Displaced Bosnians are not returning to their homes, and NATO is failing to provide

¹⁷ Alberts, 10.

¹⁸ Chris Hedges, "Diplomats Fault Bosnia NATO Chief," The New York Times, 28 April 1996.

freedom of movement for Bosnia civilians as called for under the agreement. By failing to confront the Serbs, Smith is letting slip chances for a durable, multi-ethnic peace.

Or is he? Admiral Smith argues that he will not order his forces to hunt down war criminals because it would draw them into armed confrontations with the Serbs, forcing NATO to take sides in the conflict. NATO would lose the cherished impartiality of peacekeepers. This, in turn, would jeopardize rather than advance NATO's primary task: to separate the warring parties and to maintain the peace.¹⁹

Who is right? Only time will tell, and indeed the question of right and wrong is not the point here. The point is political judgment. Admiral Smith is understandably reluctant "to get into the gray areas of the mission." But "gray areas" there are. No political guidance or military mission anticipates and then answers all possible questions that might arise. Inevitably there will be occasions when he, the American commander in a tense and volatile peace operation is called upon to exercise a strong measure of what is in fact *political judgment* in deciding the bounds of his mission and mandate. His decisions may have the most profound consequences for the success of the mission, and the achievement of guiding U.S. political objectives. In exercising his judgment in "gray areas," inevitably there will be controversy because these are areas where reasonable men can disagree. And they are areas where the stakes may be high for U.S. policy. In such circumstances the American commander must not only be the consummate military leader; he must also be a man uniquely attuned to Washington policy and politics, and a man of consummate political skill and judgment.

¹⁹ Ibid.

The GI as Ambassador

But does the need for political acumen stop with the American commander and his senior staff? What about officers and soldiers at lower levels? To what degree do they need an awareness of the political and cultural complexities of the mission? On April 9 NATO defended the decision to hand over seven men, believed to be Muslims, to Bosnian Serb authorities after the group had surrendered to American artillery troops.²⁰ The seven men, wearing fatigues and carrying weapons were spotted moving through rugged country toward the Serb-held town of Zvornik. NATO said they were handed over to Serb police in Zvornik because they constituted an armed group in violation of the Dayton Accord. The NATO spokesman explained “in the eyes of the *commander on the ground* it was a clear criminal matter for civil jurisdiction (emphasis added).”²¹ Earlier, however, a ranking NATO officer charged that the American military had blundered, and that the American military command had tried to get the men back but it was too late.²² The point here is that *on the ground*, in tense and politically-charged peace operations, even mid- and lower-ranking American officers will often have to make politically-sensitive decisions in the glare of intense media scrutiny.

In Somalia different kinds of “political” tasks were expected of junior officers, requiring an understanding of Somalia’s political and cultural complexities. In Afgoye, for example, an MP company commander was given the task of “cleaning up the town.” Beyond running the bandits off the streets, he had to identify responsible citizens, form local government councils, and restart the town’s civil organization. This captain served both as mayor’s advisor and civil

²⁰ “U.S. Transfer of Muslims to Serbs is Defended,” *The New York Times*, 14 May 1996, A11.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

service coordinator until local authorities could take over. Because of his talent and overall understanding of the political dimension of his actions, he was successful.²³

Consequently, do soldiers in a multinational peace enforcement need to understand the overall mission? Opinions run the gamut. There are those who argue that in politically charged peace operations, where every military misstep is the focus of intense media scrutiny, literally every soldier should understand the “politics” of the situation he is in. As one Norwegian officer in Somalia put it, “one little [political mistake] can ruin the whole thing.” To minimize these mistakes, he maintained even privates should understand the political situation since they will make many critical, politically-charged decisions.²⁴ As the Bosnia incident above illustrates (involving the turnover of seven armed Muslims to Serb authorities), orders cannot be given to cover all circumstances, and time does not permit senior officers to be involved in every case.

Others support the idea that at least battalion commanders and above should be well versed in both political and military objectives. Some argue that political education is extremely important for all field grade officers, but that only cultural awareness and an understanding of the military mission should be emphasized at lower levels.²⁵

Many agree, however, that negotiating skills deserve special emphasis. Officers and NCOs will be in close contact with combatant and noncombatant groups in situations where decentralized *diplomacy* and on-the-spot negotiating skills can defuse volatile situations, saving American, allied, and noncombatant lives -- and perhaps salvaging U.S. policy.²⁶

An understanding of the rules of engagement is also critical in volatile peace operations. ROE have political significance that can resonate far beyond the battlefield. As noted above,

²³ Bullock, 22.

²⁴ Daniel, 193.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Major General William A. Stofft, “Ethnic Conflict: Implications for the Army of the Future,” Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, Carlisle Barracks, PA: 1994, 16.

global transparency, the ubiquitous news media, and the political nature of collective security and peacekeeping forge an unprecedented convergence of the tactical, operational, and strategic levels of war in the theater of operations. The decision of a single military unit can bring immediate praise or condemnation from the world community. Similarly, a single explosive event with “high casualties” (as in Somalia) can cause U.S. domestic support to evaporate overnight.²⁷

Not only are ROE sensitive, but the American commander must remember that the ROE will vary given different cultural biases towards the people of the host nation and combat in general. In Somalia, the ROE depended upon perceived threat and proportional response. While the various national contingents responded within the ROE, there was a great deal of variation in interpretation. The Pakistani forces were notorious for their brutal responses; the Belgians believed in “smacking the people and then feeding them”; and the Italians were the source of ill-will among the UN forces for their soft treatment of the Somali people.²⁸ The American commander must anticipate that different skill levels and cultural backgrounds will lead contingents to implement ROE in widely different ways. Combined exercise, scenario-based education, and high-quality forces are the only hedges against this problem.²⁹

So, do soldiers in a multi-national peace enforcement need to understand the overall mission? I believe they do. The individual soldier may not need the knowledge of an ambassador or JTF commander, but he should know the general political and military objectives and his place in the overall plan. Cultural, political, and mission training are all essential to a successful operation. In today’s tense and highly volatile peace operations, the American soldier more than ever before is an “ambassador in uniform.”

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Daniel, 198.

²⁹ Bullock, 62.

The Merging of Diplomat and Warrior?

After the Cold War, as the UN Security Council manifested an ever greater willingness to intervene in complex humanitarian and nation-building exercises, there were those who argued that -- particularly in peace enforcement operations -- there were few truly unique differences with conventional war.³⁰

That view has changed considerably.³¹ War, it is true, is politics by other means. But the “political” dimensions of war are multiplied and intensified in peace operations. The American commander as leader of a UN or coalition force must possess highly refined “political” skills in the broadest sense of the word. He must appreciate the divergent political agendas of contributing nations that drive the many variations in what a country will do, when, and even where. He must recognize the “political” sensitivities between individual countries (like Greece and Turkey) and manage their interaction accordingly.

He must also recognize the political complexities of interaction among individual contributing nations, and between those nations and the host country. How, for example, will Serbs react to NATO Turks in Bosnia, or Somalis to the Italians, their former colonial masters? Too he must master the “politics” of coping with an alphabet soup of UN agencies and private humanitarian relief organizations. In such a multifarious environment where command and control runs the gamut from difficult to impossible, the American commander must be a true master of an array of “political” skills to achieve unity of effort, and advance his country’s objectives.

Deft use of his political advisor, the pertinent Ambassador and Defense Attaché, intelligence, and military area specialists can cast much light on this tangled web of “political”

³⁰ Alberts, 9.

³¹ Ibid.

interaction. But the American commander must be politically astute enough to ask the right questions at the right time. And there will be occasions when he must make decisions with a significant element of political judgment. These are decisions that he knows carry not only military but potentially significant political repercussions. Admiral Smith in Bosnia, in making decisions in the politically-fraught “gray area” of his mission probably conferred with his Washington superiors, but has clearly not always followed the advice of his political advisor or even the relevant American ambassadors, and has sometimes acted at odds with them.³² Indeed, in making such decisions, he must not only look to his mission statement; he must also interpret his mission in light of what he believes are his nation’s political objectives. In doing so, he strives not only to exercise his best military judgment, but also exercises a significant element of political judgment as well.

No CINC presumes to act as Secretary of State. Nor does the American commander of a UN or coalition peace force presume to usurp the role of Ambassador. Both understand that the military and the foreign affairs communities have fundamentally different yet complementary roles to play in our nation’s affairs. But in peace operations, laboring under the hot glare of the media spotlight, the warrior will at times find his decisions laden with a high degree of political content -- whether it is a NATO commander’s decision not to pursue war criminals in Bosnia, a ground commander’s decision to turn over armed Bosnians to Serbs, or a major’s mandate in Somalia to “clean up the town.” America’s military is blessed with the best and brightest. Now more than ever, these military men and women must possess not only incisive military judgment, but discerning political instincts as well.

³² Hedges, A11.

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